



Here I Am

365
Devotions
for Teens

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Be Doers

*But be doers of the word,
and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

—James 1:22

Welcome to 2019! A new year has begun, and you are picking up a new devotional book. Perhaps this is the first one you have ever read, or maybe you are an avid reader of devotional books. Either way, this book is meant to help you on your daily walk with God. Every step forward in life matters, and I have personally prayed over this book, hoping that God would bless and spiritually grow every young person who reads it.

James 1:22 gives a challenge to Christians that I would like you to make your “mission statement” for 2019. Be a *doer* of the Word, not just a *hearer*. Hearers sit and listen in Sabbath School, attend church, and are fine enough people. However, if you are only a hearer, you do not put anything you are learning into practice. If there is a plate of your favorite meal in front of you, are you going to eat it or just look at it? Be a *doer*. Eat the meal; do not just stare at it.

Young people have a great potential for being influencers of change in the world. You might think it is the older people that really make a difference, but believe it or not, the voice of a teenager is much more powerful! If you were to get up and deliver a sermon at your church or start a small group Bible study or begin a community outreach program, it would shake the church into action in amazing ways! When people see a youth following God’s call in their life to do big things, they will jump on board and support you!

As you walk the halls of your school this year, sit in church, or attend programs and hang out with friends, choose to be a *doer* of the Word. Live out your walk with God in your daily life, not just once a week at church. By *doing* God’s Word, you can change the world!

Hitting the Refresh Button

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD,
plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

—Jeremiah 29:11

The spinning circle of a website refreshing is enough to cause stress in most people. We are accustomed to having everything at our fingertips, with instant access to all our heart’s desires. While it is annoying to need to hit the refresh button, the reward is always worth it because you reach your intended destination online successfully!

The beginning of a new year is a great time to hit the refresh button on your life, especially your spiritual life. While nothing physically changes from December 31 to January 1, the significance of a new year triggers a desire within to start over and do better in the new year. We set goals, aim higher, and try to become healthier, happier people.

Once again, it is time to hit your refresh button. What is your destination? Where is it you want to be in life thirty years from now? Where do you want to be in your relationship with God? How do you imagine success? What expectations do you have for yourself or for God? How do you plan to hit the refresh button on your spiritual life and grow in Christ this year? Use the lines below to ponder these questions and write your spiritual goals for the new year:

How to Read the Bible

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

—Joshua 1:8

One way to grow in your relationship with God is to have meaningful encounters with Scripture. The Bible is God’s Word to us, His message. This Book holds life-giving secrets, so learning how to read it is important.

Have you ever heard of the word *exegesis*? The word is Greek, and it means “explanation.” Essentially, *exegesis* of the Bible is interpreting it and learning the meaning of the passage. *Exegesis* focuses on the ancient text itself and what it means. Another important word, *hermeneutics*, is the theory and methodology of interpreting Scripture. So *hermeneutics* is the way you interpret the text. Although these big words may seem overwhelming, they can help you build a foundation for how you will study the Bible.

The Bible was written primarily in two languages, though a third language is used briefly. Hebrew makes up most of the Old Testament, though a small part is written in Aramaic. Both are Semitic languages, Hebrew being more Canaanite, and Aramaic being more Afro-Asiatic. The New Testament was written in Greek, an ancient language spoken in Asia Minor and used by scholars. Both Hebrew and Greek are still spoken today in their modern forms. You can think of it like the differences between reading Old English and street slang today—they come from the same original language but are spoken and understood very differently.

So when you approach a book of the Bible that you want to read, pay attention to where it is in the Bible. Is it in the Old Testament? Then its stories will be influenced by a Hebrew mind-set, with the cultures and customs of the time period influencing the way the author writes what God was inspiring them to say. Research when the book was written and what audience it first spoke to, and pay attention to the cultural nuances described in it. This will help your study of the Scriptures flourish beyond just a surface reading of verses, and you will delve into the Word with eyes wide open.

JANUARY 4

It Is All About Jesus

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

—John 1:14

It is all about Jesus. The entire Bible. Everything is all about Jesus. It is a new year, and you have a new chance to start over and make things right with Him. You have a chance to grow, learn, change, discover, and be everything you were ever made to be!

From Genesis to Revelation, the whole of Scripture points to the moment when Jesus hung on the cross. At that moment He conquered the devil forever, He won the war, and He made a way of salvation for us. Genesis begins with a fallen world in need of His saving grace. Exodus through Deuteronomy shows us the desperate search for morality and a relationship with the Creator that the Israelites went through in becoming “His people.” The whole of the Old Testament shares story after story revealing sin’s true nature and humanity’s need for a Savior to take away this horrible sin problem. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell us parables, miracles, and lessons from Jesus’ life that reveal the character of the Savior who came down to earth to complete His mission. And the rest of the New Testament shares experience after experience of how life-transforming following Jesus can be. The struggles, victories, and theological questions still point to Jesus and a desire to be closer to Him.

So as you begin this year, I challenge you to read through your Bible. You can do it in one year by reading three to five chapters a day, and it is worth making the time for! Your life will be transformed. Your picture of God will be transformed. And your relationship with your Savior, Jesus Christ, will be transformed. God will become more than just the thing you talk about once a week in Sabbath School class. He will become the very air you breathe, the one you focus all your attention on, the whole point of your life! He will give you purpose, motivation, and excitement. A life with Him is thrilling! So hit the ground running, and commit yourself to Him this year.

Salvation Is Simple

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

—John 3:16, 17

Study, take a test, get straight A’s, become class president, work on the school leadership team, play sports, write killer essays, and get a great scholarship. Doing well in high school is grueling! You work all day long, and probably long into the night, trying to ace high school. You are told that in order to do well in life, you have to get good grades, all while learning life lessons and growing into a productive and successful young person.

Salvation is sometimes presented like the academic ladders we climb to succeed in school and a future career. You have got to go to church, know all the right answers in Bible class, always be kind, put others first, and understand Revelation in order to get into heaven. Your parents may have grown up in a generation saturated with the importance of works to get into heaven. Yet the Bible tells a different story: salvation is simple. The work is not on your end; that’s God’s responsibility.

John 3:16, a famous verse you probably memorized as a kid, explains the simplicity of faith in Christ and the salvation He gives us. Read verses 15–17: “That whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

It is simple: salvation is a free gift. We do not have to “earn” our way into heaven. Our acts of goodness come as a result of our acceptance of that gift and the way we want to live our lives in response to God’s outpouring of love on us!



The Story Begins

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

—Genesis 1:1

Throughout this book you will see a few running themes, all focused on drawing you closer to God. One of these running themes will be picking a story from every book of the Bible and focusing on how its message can benefit our walk with God today.

The story begins in Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Before anything else, God existed. Before the universe, before life—in the beginning, God was. A Creator Being whose voice caused elements to combine and become matter. A Higher Power whose breath *is* life—and His words become living things. The universe was on His lips.

The book of Genesis tells the story of the beginning of the world, from its creation to the people God chose to use on earth. The first part of the book is all about God’s relationship with the world and those He created, who sadly turned away from Him and chose to sin. The second part of the book hones in on a specific person, Abraham, and his descendants whom God chose to work through.

Throughout the book of Genesis, there is one common thread that we find near the beginning. When God creates people, He makes us “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27), meaning we are supposed to reflect the character of the Creator in the world. He gives us a special power that previously only He had—we are able to create life. As you read through Genesis, you will see how the devil tempted humans to thwart this power and sometimes use it in incredibly sinful ways, going against God’s purpose for His creation.

Yet in the middle of this confusion and chaos in Genesis, there is a moment of hope: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). At this moment, God promises a Redeemer will come and crush the devil’s head, meaning he will be eternally defeated by Jesus’ death and resurrection. As you read the dramatic stories in the book of Genesis, you can be encouraged by those two main themes: (1) we are created to reflect the character of God, and (2) the Redeemer has already come, so we are saved from evil forever!

Proclaiming Christ

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth,

Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

—Philippians 1:15–18

Have you ever listened to a preacher and wondered what the true motivation for the sermon was? All preachers are human, and sometimes they fall into the trap of speaking on a topic with an ulterior motive rather than because they were moved by Christ to do so. It is easy to jump on the bandwagon of naysayers and critique them for what they preached about, but Paul has an interesting perspective to share here in Philippians.

As an apostle, Paul was frequently criticized. In addition, he had been imprisoned, beaten, and persecuted for proclaiming the gospel of Christ on his missionary trips. In this letter to the believers in Philippi, he makes the point that some people preach about Christ with an ulterior motive. However, does Paul get upset at their preaching? Nope. Instead, he rejoices! Above all else, he wants Christ to be proclaimed. At that time in history, most of the world did not yet know the good news about Christ. They had not heard the stories about this Man of Nazareth. They did not know about the Man who had healed the sick, helped the needy, stood up to Pharisees, and even raised the dead. News about Jesus, King of the Jews, who died on a cross and was raised again to life in three days, had not spread around the world, so Paul was eager for any word about Christ to get out there!

Today we need to take his message carefully. It is important that we seek to uplift Christ in our words and actions. Our focus should be on having a relationship with Him and spreading His love to a world in need. I hope that you will choose to be one of the ones who proclaim Christ out of a heart of goodwill and will rejoice when Christ's name is preached!

Basics for Belief: Theology

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity.

—Hebrews 6:1

What is *theology*? This word means “the study of God.” *Theos* means “God” in Greek, and any word with *-ology* on the end means “the study of” something. Theology is the way that we learn about and experience God intellectually. We use the beautiful minds He created us with to study Him and learn more about Him. As you grow in your own experience with God this year, we’ll have a few sections of this devotional dedicated to expanding your own theology. Forming a foundation for your basic beliefs is important in helping determine how you relate to the world around you.

Let’s start with natural theology. Natural theology is a combination of philosophy and theology that gives arguments for the existence of God based on things you can experience in nature or facts you can observe. It uses human reason to try to prove God’s existence and define His attributes.

General revelation, on the other hand, is knowledge about God that any person can experience. This would include your conscience, the ability to tell between right and wrong. It includes the laws of nature that we observe in the universe, which tell us about God’s wisdom, power, and greatness.

Can you think of ways you have already used these two types of theology in your system of belief? Have you ever marveled at the detail on a butterfly’s wings and thought about the amazing Creator we have? Observing the laws of motion or the intricacies of the human body can give us a glimpse into God’s desire for order and perfection as well as His attention to detail. Maybe you have even had a philosophical conversation with a friend that led to each of you understanding a bit more about God and His role in your lives. As you begin your journey with Him this year, commit yourself to watch for evidence of Him in the things you see around you every day. His fingerprints are everywhere!